

**From:** [Thabault, Michael](#)  
**To:** [Carol Schuler](#)  
**Subject:** Re: recent changes  
**Date:** Friday, October 31, 2014 3:49:07 PM

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I can do that for just a little while my flight is at 3:15 MT so I could do about 15 minutes

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On Fri, Oct 31, 2014 at 3:28 PM, Carol Schuler <[cschuler@usgs.gov](mailto:cschuler@usgs.gov)> wrote:

Hi Dave – Well this is a big change. I'm on a plane in DC about ready to take off so no time to digest this further and provide any kind of response. However, a discussion on Monday would be good. Would 1:30 (PT) work? 1:00 will be difficult for me to break away.

Carol

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*Carol Schuler, Center Director*

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**From:** Smith, David [mailto:[drsmith@usgs.gov](mailto:drsmith@usgs.gov)]  
**Sent:** Friday, October 31, 2014 2:41 PM  
**To:** Carol Schuler; Sarah Converse  
**Cc:** Michael Thabault  
**Subject:** recent changes

Hi Carol,

There have been some developments regarding the sage-grouse status assessment SDM process. At our meeting with the RDs in Sacramento this week, we were made aware of a change of direction within the USFWS. The RDs have decided against pursuing an SDM approach to the status review and listing determination. It will be worthwhile for you to discuss this with Mike Thabault to get his perspective on how this change came about. However, it is fair to say that the RDs want to frame the decision in a way that is most consistent with the 2010 finding, and an SDM approach would deviate too much from that. Given the importance of the decision, we certainly respect and appreciate the RDs' point of view. Sarah and I agree with the change as it has now become clear that remaining engaged in the decision process would not be productive for us or for them.

In light of this, we have reassessed the work plan for the post doc, Jonathan Cummings, who we hired on a term position using funds (FY14 and FY15) that you provided to support our work on sage-grouse. We now propose to task him with decision-science research relevant to, but not directly on, sage-grouse. We think that the major products that Jonathan should produce, in terms of papers, etc., will be similar to what he would have produced if the SDM process had gone forward. In particular, Jonathan would investigate how complex science information is incorporated into listing decisions. In many status reviews, science information arrives from multiple sources with varying degrees of uncertainty and in the form of different metrics. This situation presents large challenges when comparing the science to standards that define species status. The sage-grouse status review is an example of that, but the problem is much broader. We want to investigate and compare technical approaches to this problem. This research would be amenable to a simulation study, which could be completed within the scope of Jonathan's term. With Jonathan's participation we would also write a review paper on a decision-analytic framework for listing decisions. While SDM won't be applied to the sage-grouse status assessment, the long-term direction of the USFWS is clearly toward the use of explicitly decision-analytic tools, and USGS is uniquely situated to contribute to that. In fact, a number of the RDs and ARDs involved indicated their interest in potentially pursuing a process like this with future listing decisions. We therefore believe it is worthwhile, and in fact crucial, to continue to develop an SDM approach to listing decisions.

We plan to participate in the next USGS sage-grouse call to explain the change of plans to the USGS sage-grouse community. We want to ensure them that USFWS is still invested in a science-driven process and that their science products are essential.

We'd like to set up a time when we can discuss this further. If you are available to talk on Monday at 1pm Pacific/2pm Mountain/4pm Eastern, Mike Thabault will be available to join us. If you are not available at that time, please suggest alternative times when we can talk.

Thanks,

Dave Smith

Sarah Converse

David R. Smith

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